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SUBJECT: ECUADOR - RECOMMENDATION FOR JULIA TAFT REFUGEE
FUND

REF: STATE 14280

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Embassy Quito recommends Asylum Access-Ecuador as a 2009 recipient of the Julia Taft Fund for Refugees. Asylum Access' mission in Ecuador is to assist refugees in realizing their rights to employment, education, and security within their first country of refuge. The Taft assistance will support the organization's Ecuadorian branch in filling an important gap in training refugees to adapt and achieve self-reliance through its well-received Know Your Rights campaign. The proposed Julia Taft funding of \$20,000, coupled with matching funding from Asylum Access in the U.S. of \$15,000, would finance this program and fill a need in regard to Ecuador's newly implemented Enhanced Registration process, while preserving refugees' rights under Ecuador's new constitution. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) Asylum Access is a small U.S.-based nonprofit. Its mission is to assist refugees in realizing their rights to employment, education, and security within their first countries of refuge. The group's approach to fostering the sustainable development of local refugee legal aid organizations has resulted in locally-run branches in Ecuador, Thailand and Tanzania.

¶3. (SBU) Asylum Access-Ecuador (AAE) is actively engaged with refugees in a manner that complements Ecuador's Enhanced Registration process, which UNHCR and the GOE began in March. AAE provides community education and individualized rights counseling to refugees throughout Ecuador who are struggling to understand and navigate this new process, which allows them to obtain official refugee status from the GOE. AAE also provides individualized legal counseling to prepare refugee clients to exercise their lawful rights, including constitutional rights provided for in the Ecuadorian constitution that went into effect in October 2008.

¶4. (SBU) If selected, the \$20,000 of assistance from the Julia Taft Fund will allow AAE to expand its community education and client counseling program. Specifically the funding will cover workshop and training costs, including equipment and materials, travel to reach refugees outside Quito, and partial staff time to develop and implement the training and individualized rights counseling. Asylum Access in the U.S. will match these funds with at least \$15,000 from individual donors and private foundations, which will primarily cover the cost of staffing a legal advisor.

¶5. (U) A key component of AAE's programming is its well-received Know Your Rights education campaign. For the last two years, AAE legal advocates have conducted two- to three-hour-long training sessions for persons of concern to increase awareness of their legal rights and the tools they need to assert such rights. Currently, each training session

addresses a different right guaranteed by the new Ecuadorian constitution, such as the right to work, right to education and right to apply for refugee status. The recipients receive practical hands-on tools to exercise their rights (such as how to open a bank account) through scenario role-playing. AAE is also developing Know Your Rights sessions on the right to health, right to freedom from discrimination, and right not to be a victim of abuse (including domestic violence, trafficking, and sexual violence).

¶6. (SBU) The proposed funding will fill a critical gap in rights-based refugee assistance in Ecuador, especially for those fleeing the conflict in nearby Colombia. These training sessions are crucial because, although the new Ecuadorian constitution prohibits discrimination on the basis of nationality and migratory status, these prohibitions have yet to be implemented in practice. Refugees continue to face widespread violation of their employment rights, which limits their ability to provide for themselves and their families, and places these already vulnerable groups in greater risk.

¶7. (SBU) UNHCR estimates that Ecuador is host to at least 135,000 persons of concern from Colombia, of which 22,000 were granted refugee status and another 72,000 have pending asylum applications with the GOE, prior to the implementation of its Enhanced Registration program. During the past eight weeks, the GOE, with UNHCR support, has registered approximately 6,000 refugees through this program. However, recent reports by the UNHCR and its implementing partners indicate that the number of Colombian refugees crossing into

Ecuador may be on the rise. There is a critical need for targeted legal assistance, counseling and community education to reduce the risk that these vulnerable individuals face and facilitate their legal integration into the host communities. Asylum Access, through AAE, is providing these much needed services and a Taft Fund grant will enable them to reach more persons of concern in a more effective manner.

¶8. (SBU) Embassy Quito strongly recommends funding the AAE project at the level of \$20,000. We have reviewed the code of conduct used by Asylum Access, including in Ecuador, and confirm that it meets the standards referenced in reftel. Embassy Quito has also forwarded AAE's complete proposal, including a budget breakdown, to PRM.
HODGES